University of Saskatchewan

2024 TUITION SURVEY FOR STUDENTS - REPORT ON FINDINGS

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Background

In alignment with the University of Saskatchewan's goal to engage in robust annual discussions with students about tuition, USask undertook its fourth Tuition Survey for Students in October 2024. The format of this year's annual survey reflects the progressive development of survey items, with efforts made to ensure that the survey is easy to complete. As a new addition this year, students were asked questions about the availability of housing.

The survey invitation also included a reminder that participation is voluntary, and responses are anonymous. The invitation indicated that the goal is to develop key points of action from the student responses that will be shared with university leaders. The survey was open for student responses for three weeks.

Who Responded?

Just over 2,000 students responded to an e-mail invitation to provide feedback, which was sent to all undergraduate and graduate students. This represents a response rate of 9%. Complete data were available for **2,016** students.

The demographics for the responding student group are as follows:

- 78% domestic; 22% international
- 77% undergraduate (including 69% direct-entry and 8% non-direct entry programs)
- 23% graduate (15% master's and 8% doctoral)
- 31% of responding students reported being in their first year of studies, 25% in their second year, and 17% in their third year; the remaining participants (27%) reported pursuing their degree for four or more years
- More than one-third of students responding (38%) were registered in the College of Arts and Science, with four other direct-entry colleges showing similar proportions of representation, including: Education (10%), Edwards School of Business (9%), Engineering (9%), and Agriculture and Bioresources (8%). The proportion of the sample from other colleges and schools can be seen in Appendix A.

Areas of Investment That Are Important to Students

Students were asked to consider a range of 28 possible areas where they believe their college or school, and the university as a whole, should consider investing resources to improve education quality, student experience, and/or student supports that are provided. Responses were provided on a scale ranging from 1 ("not at all important") to 4 ("very important"). Following each cluster of items, students had an opportunity to provide additional ideas about investments.

The table below shows the proportion of students who rated an item as important. The first column reflects those who indicated that an item was "Important" or "Very Important." The second column indicates those items for which there was at least 10% difference between graduate (G) and undergraduate (UG) students and between international (I) and domestic students (D).

Investment Area	Important + Very Important %	Differences (at least 10%)
Increase open access textbooks and digital online resources	88	
Offer more scholarships and bursaries	86	I>D, G>UG
Increase opportunities for internships and work-integrated learning	75	I>D, G>UG
Enhance career support to help students transition out of university	75	I>D
Make improvements to student wellness services (in general) (e.g. such as access to medical health professionals)	74	I>D, G>UG
Improve availability of academic advising to reduce wait times	**72 (#2)**	I>D
Increase mental health supports	72	I>D, G>UG
Improve parking options	**69 (#3)**	D>I, UG>G
Increase employment opportunities for students on campus	68	I>D, G>UG
Improve safety and security on campus	68	I>D, G>UG
Increase assistance to students in navigating the university processes (e.g., registering for classes, financial information, academic policy)	65	I>D
Increase the number of study spaces on campus	**64 (#1)**	UG>G
Improve the quality of instruction by providing better learning technology tools such as Canvas, university-wide accepted AI tools, etc.	64	I>D
More comfortable / flexible seating in classrooms	63	
Improve quality of instruction through expanded training opportunities for instructors (e.g., additional training in how to use Canvas)	61	I>D
Improve accessibility, particularly supports provided through Access and Equity Service (AES).	61	I>D, G>UG
Provide healthier food options or more choices (e.g., halal, vegetarian, more culturally diverse food options)	60	I>D, G>UG
Improvements to lab facilities	59	I>D, G>UG
Expand the hours of operation for libraries	59	I>D
Increase the availability of on-line classes	59	I>D
Increase the availability of learning resources to support greater understanding and awareness of anti-racism	58	I>D, G>UG
Enhanced maintenance and renovation of buildings	58	I>D
Increase the availability of learning resources to support greater understanding of sustainability	58	I>D, G>UG
Increase the availability of hybrid classes (e.g., where a class involves learning on-line and in-person)	56	I>D
Increase access to tutors such as those available through the Learning Hub in the University Library	55	I>D
Enhancements to study rooms	52	I>D
Upgrades to classroom technology	50	I>D, G>UG
Expand the hours of operation for food services	49	I>D

Note: *The #1, #2, and #3 above represent those items that were ranked as first, second, and third by respondents.*

Among the cluster of desired investment areas with the highest proportions of importance ratings (up to 67% or 2/3 of the students who responded), seven out of the ten items pertain to services and programs where students believe more investment would be important (i.e., online textbooks, financial aid, support for career transition, internship opportunities, employment opportunities, safety and security on campus and academic advising). Two of the top items are from the student wellness cluster (i.e., mental health supports, wellness in general). Some importance was also placed on facilities and infrastructure (i.e., parking). All of the four populations (domestic, International, undergraduate and graduate) placed importance on increasing open access textbooks and digital online resources, while graduate and international students placed higher importance on additional scholarships and bursaries. With a different comparative lens, for nine of the ten items with the highest proportions of importance, a greater number of international students who participated in the survey endorsed these investments as important or very important when compared to the proportion of domestic students, with the exception of parking.

After providing ratings for each of the 28 items shown on the table, students were asked to identify the three most critically important investments from the full set. The top ranked item for students was to increase the number of study spaces on campus. The second ranked item was to improve the availability of academic advising to reduce wait times, and the third was to improve parking options.

In addition to rating the importance of specific investments, responses to open-ended questions included other exemplars of the investment categories. Some of the responses were further elaborations about items that had already been rated, including seeking greater investment into: (1) student financial supports (specific references to international students and graduate students), (2) the cost and availability of parking, (3) improving the quality of instruction, (4) increasing the availability (specifically the hours) and the number of study spaces, (5) increasing the availability of food options (number of locations and times of day), (6) less expensive food options, and (7) increased variety of food options. Some students commented on their desire to understand how tuition increases are being invested both within their own college/school and across the university. Importantly, students can attend the annual tuition town hall for their college or school and get clear information about these very questions.

Students had the opportunity to provide open-ended responses regarding disinvestments, specifically, respondents were asked to identify areas where they believed the college / school or university should look to disinvest or remove resources that may no longer be providing the intended value to the quality of education, student experience, and needed student supports. These responses included a subset of items that are outside the university's purview, including, for example, *The Sheaf*, the transit pass, and medical/dental insurance. These activities are under the oversight of the USSU and/or the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) and questions about opting out should be directed to these student governing bodies.

Other open-ended comments showed a pattern of responses that mirrored the ratings described above. Whereas some students elaborated on the need for disinvesting in the PAC, others took the position that access to these facilities is critical for students' well-being. Some students used the survey to ask for greater transparency about the university's resource allocation and budgeting. For the last several years, the university has been building and updating modules that provide more detailed information for students to improve their knowledge and understanding of these important topics. Specific financial information can be found on the tuition consultation webpage.

This year's survey included specific questions on housing. Students were asked where they lived and if they had difficulty finding housing for this academic year. If they indicated they had difficulty, they were asked to identify the factors that made it difficult. 30% indicated that they live with parents or other family members, 14% indicated they live in student housing (residence), 23% rent on their own, 23% rent with roommates and 10% own a home. Although

almost one in four respondents indicated they had difficulty finding housing this year, a vast majority indicated it was due to the price point, although a small number indicated there were very few units available.

Conclusions

The 2024 Tuition Survey for Students resulted in more than 2,000 students providing their input on areas for greater investment at USask, where the university could reduce spending. Not surprisingly, for students, there is much interest in and importance placed on areas where incremental investment is desirable. It is also clear that the university is making investments into many of these areas and needs to increase efforts to inform students of these investments.

The response rate for the 2024 survey was lower than the previous two years. Accordingly, ways to further increase student participation in 2025 will be explored (e.g., changing the timing of the survey, enhanced advertising). Given that students considered many of the items important, it was helpful to employ a ranking mechanism to gauge the relative importance of investment areas from those who responded.

The findings from this survey provide helpful insights and guidance on where students would like to see incremental investments. The findings will inform ongoing and annual discussions about resource allocation, in general, and tuition discussions, in particular.

Appendix A

Distribution of Student Respondents from each College/School

College or Department	**Percentage**
Agriculture and Bioresources	8
Arts and Science	38
Dentistry	1
Education	10
Edwards School of Business	9
Engineering	9
Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies	3
Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy	1
Kinesiology	3
Law	2
Medicine	2
Nursing	5
Pharmacy and Nutrition	2
School of Environment and Sustainability	2
School of Public Health	2
School of Rehabilitation Science	0.2
Veterinary Medicine	2

Note: There was only one school with frequencies less than 10 students. The percentages sum to less than 100% due to rounding.

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Leadership.usask.ca/provost/consultation.php